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NOTES FROM PARENTS' ASSOCIATIONS

MRS. HELEN MALEY HEFFERAN
President of Illinois Congress of Mothers, Chicago

At the December meeting of the Parents' Association of the Chicago Normal School the subject of "Christmas Giving" was discussed.

Mrs. H. W. Thurston spoke of the opinion that is expressed so frequently in these days, that the spirit of Christmas giving is not what it should be; that it is marred by overdoing and overstrain; that a sense of obligation and of paying debts often takes the place of free expression of love and good-will. Mrs. Thurston maintained that these things are the result of the strenuous method of life in American cities; that something enters into our home for its detriment and into our school life to its harm. To quote from the speaker's words:

We give ourselves too little leisure to consider the spirit of anything. We are too much absorbed in *doing* things to consider *why* we do them or how they should be done; too much absorbed in buying Christmas presents to consider sufficiently the spirit of giving. The spirit of Christmas giving is *love*. How this would simplify matters for us, if we were to allow it! Let us give in love — never for any other reason — and teach our children to give in love.

Mrs. Thurston advised that the children begin with the home circle. As the child grows, his powers of love and sympathy should expand and grow with him, taking in a wider and wider circle of relatives, friends, and neighbors, until the man and woman in maturity shall have a heart to embrace humanity.

Mrs. A. D. Hefferan said that in the home it was essential that time be given for the children to plan for their gifts; that one should strive for simplicity, not expenditure of money, but some expenditure of thought and effort; that the mother should plan to secure co-operation between older brothers and sisters. This Christmas planning and giving — for love alone, simply and thoughtfully and painstakingly — would develop real character.

Miss Melva Latham then spoke from the teacher's standpoint. She said that the making of Christmas presents in the room created a beautiful atmosphere, for the children had a definite purpose in the making. When the present was to be used by one who was loved there was always a joy in creating. When children were happy, they were good. The results from Christmas work in the schoolroom were always excellent. First, concentration was perfect, because the motive underlying the work was the best — superlatively unselfish. Patience was developed. A child is willing to do again and again, because working for one he loves. Here again the motive controls him. Then the timid child has an opportunity for individual work which strengthens him for his regular school work. Miss Latham emphasized strongly the necessity for appreciation on the part of the recipient on account of the struggles of children to produce something worth while. Be *sure* to *use* whatever is made, if ever so poorly made, or even a trifle in itself. She closed with that beautiful quotation from Jacob Riis' "Is There a Santa Claus?"

Because, don't you know, Santa Claus is the spirit of Christmas; and ever and ever so many years ago, when the dear little Baby was born after whom we call Christmas, and was cradled in a manger out in the stable because there was not room in the inn, that Spirit came into the world to soften the hearts of men and make them love one another. Therefore, that is the mark of the spirit to this day. Don't let anybody or anything rub it out. Then the rest doesn't matter.

A meeting of Englewood High School Parents' Club on Thursday afternoon, January 19, presented some novel features. The announced topic for discussion was "Fraternities and Sororities" — a subject of such interest to the pupils that they begged to be allowed to attend and to defend their societies. The number in attendance was so large that the meeting adjourned to the assembly hall, and very few of the 350 seats were unoccupied.

The concensus of opinion from high schools throughout the country was presented by Principal Armstrong, Miss Ball, and Mr. Miller (of the Englewood High School faculty), and was strongly against the existence of fraternities and sororities in the high schools.

The meeting was then thrown open for general discussion, and the most prejudiced listener was forced to admire the frank and fearless manner in which the boys and girls presented their side of the argument, as well as their ease and readiness of speech in the presence of so large an audience. Kindly feeling prevailed throughout, as teachers, parents, and pupils drew together in a sort of family council.

While it cannot be said that the boys and girls who favored fraternities and sororities when they entered the hall were of a different mind when they left, yet they left with something new to think about, and since no bitterness of spirit resulted, they will think and think rationally. What more could be asked?

The Englewood High School Parents' Club has always drawn near to the ideal organization of its kind, inasmuch as it has clung to the "conference" plan, and has not permitted extraneous "programs" to interfere with its practical consideration of practical matters. This meeting came even nearer to the ideal, perhaps, than any former one, since it admitted the child himself to the discussion of what was best for him.

Throughout the state of Illinois there is much interest in the question of a closer touch between the home and the school. The superintendent of Coles County requested that a meeting be held in every school in the county on a certain date for the promotion of such a co-operation. Each teacher prepared a short program, which was followed by an informal discussion of school problems. This superintendent has also been holding parents' meetings throughout the fall in the rural schools. These have been largely attended, and it is exceedingly interesting to see the school-yard surrounded by the vehicles in which many of the patrons came. The teachers explain the industrial work the children are doing—sewing, cutting, etc. There is an exhibit of the work, and at the conclusion refreshments are served.

Every school in Charleston now has a parents' club as an adjunct which is an educational necessity, and the community is, in consequence, alive to the interests of the schools. A meeting of the parents of Charleston high-school pupils was held in the

assembly hall on the evening of January 13. Mr. J. A. Shortess, president of the board of education, opened the discussion on "The Effects of Irregularity of Attendance on Later Habits." He discussed the subject from a business man's standpoint, showing how good habits were the basis of success. He emphasized the fact that responsibility for absence and tardiness rests not so much with the teacher as with the parent. Hon. H. A. Neal followed with suggestions for overcoming irregularity in attendance. Mr. Jeffrey, principal of the high school, cited some of the flimsy excuses offered by pupils and parents for absence and tardiness. It appeared to be the sense of the meeting that excuses should not be asked for, as they tended to justify the pupil in his delinquency. Mr. Elwood, superintendent of the Charleston schools, spoke relative to the semi-annual examinations. He took as the basis of his remarks "The end of education is a responsible human being."

The superintendent writes that these meetings will be held regularly once a month.